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Exorcising summit ghosts

Mutual expulsion of envoys shares stage with arms talks

■ The latest chapter in U.S.-Soviet relations was a study in two-track diplomacy. On one was a series of tit-for-tat diplomatic expulsions in which both sides looked faintly silly; on the other, cold-eyed pursuit of what may yet be possible in arms control. The bottom line in current superpower relations is resolve to sustain forward motion—or at least to avoid the blame for failure.

Both sides claim that the sweeping proposals made at Reykjavik two weeks ago are still on the table. Yet they disagree about what those actually were. Administration guidance to U.S. negotiators at renewed talks in Geneva fell back to pre-Reykjavik terms. The Soviets had yet to make a specific new offer.

Apparently, one U.S. official said, the Soviets felt they stood to gain by waiting for the U.S. and its allies to sort out their internal positions. On the surface, there was not a great deal of sorting to be done. President Reagan claimed confidence that arms control had been advanced at Reykjavik. At a meeting of the North Atlantic Treaty Organization's nuclear-planning group in Scotland, U.S. allies offered almost effusive support for the administration's position.

But, in fact, post-Reykjavik confusion still plagues the administration. Most of it is residue from Reagan's eager and unexpected entry into talk of sweeping nuclear disarmament with Mikhail Gorbachev. The talks ultimately broke down over Gorbachev's demand that Reagan give up his Strategic Defense Initiative, or Star Wars. But they went far enough to set off alarms within the alliance and even within the administration.

Security, practicality issues

Senior U.S. military leaders—not consulted in advance—worried that the idealistic terms discussed at Reykjavik would put the U.S. hopelessly on the defensive. Members of Congress continued to mutter that the administration had blown it by failing to honor practicality. And despite their public support, U.S. allies complained privately that the administration had neglected their security concerns. If the U.S. was prepared to eliminate intermediate-range nuclear weapons from Europe—a Reykjavik topic—then what about Soviet superiority in shorter-range missiles? And what about vast Soviet non-nuclear superiority? Manfred Woerner, West Germany's Defense Minister, was so fretful that he ducked the NATO meeting in Scotland to accompany Chancellor Helmut Kohl to Washington for soundings.

CHARLIE ARCHAMBAULT FOR USN&WR

Expulsions restrict Soviet presence in U.S. under Ambassador Dubinin, center

Publicly, at least, Reagan himself seemed unabashed. In appearances for Republican candidates around the U.S., the President emphasized that he had stood up to the Soviets and refused to yield on Star Wars. Yet "we're closer to real arms reductions than ever before," he declared. Every poll showed the public solidly backed him. What troubled even some supporters, however, was not that Reagan might yield on his personal principles but that the administration may have failed to consider where it was headed at Reykjavik.

Eventually, Reagan felt compelled to defend himself indirectly on that point. Late last week, the White House issued a detailed reconstruction of the Reagan-Gorbachev talks on a key issue. Gorbachev claimed Reagan had been ready—Star Wars aside—to agree on elimination of all nuclear weapons over 10 years. No, said the White House, the President merely had agreed to that as an eventual goal—as he had before. What he had proposed was elimination of all long-range ballistic missiles over a decade, and a 50 percent cut in all other strategic weapons. Even that much struck many arms experts as unrealistic.

The official position remained, however, that the superpowers now must reap the advances from Reykjavik. "The summit leapfrogged a lot of problems," a senior official said. "It bottom-lined everything and showed us where the Soviets are willing to go." Perhaps. The Soviets weren't really saying. Gorbachev continued to stir the pot with his second major post-Reykjavik speech—blaming Reagan for intransigence on SDI but saying the Geneva negotiations should go forward.

JOE MARQUETTE—REUTERS/BETTMANN NEWSPHOTOS

Allied front: Britain's Carrington and U.S.'s Weinberger

Meanwhile, neither side added new substance in Geneva. The administration sent Ambassador Max Kampelman, chief negotiator, the Reykjavik terms for future reference. But it

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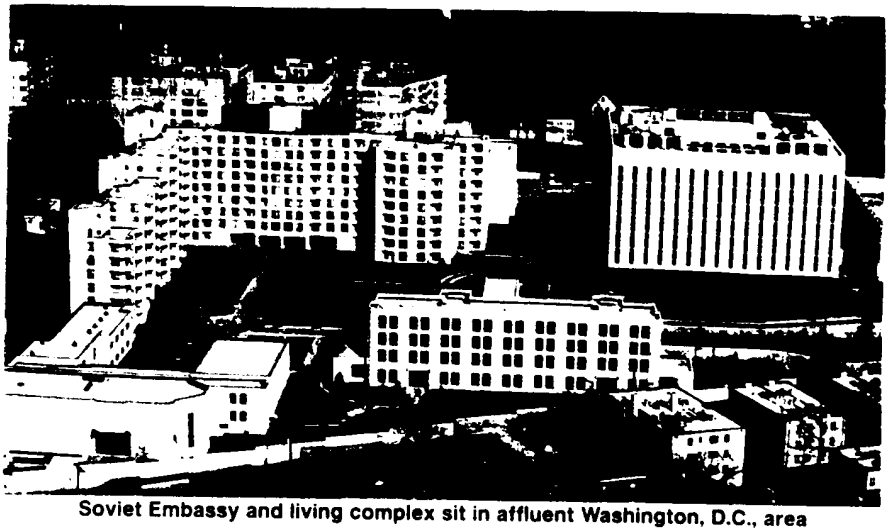
authorized him to talk only about a possible deal on missiles in Europe and limits on nuclear testing—exactly where the negotiations stood before Reykjavik.

While the superpowers reassessed the tedious business of arms control, the public was entranced by the spectacle of diplomatic one-upmanship. The Soviets set off the latest round a week after Reykjavik when they ordered five American diplomats out of Moscow for activities "incompatible with their official status"—diplomatese for spying. No one doubted that the action was retaliation for the earlier American expulsion of 25 Soviet employes at the United Nations. Washington struck back, evicting five Soviet diplomats on general principles and 50 more to bring the Soviet complement in the U.S. down to the U.S. level in Moscow. Again the Soviets responded, booting out five more Americans and withdrawing some 200 Soviet employes from the U.S. Embassy in Moscow and consulate in Leningrad.

With that, both sides paused for breath and U.S. diplomats in Moscow relearned how to sweep, drive cars, cook and muscle crates. The administration was ready for a truce. "We need to get on with the larger issues affecting U.S.-Soviet relations," one official declared.

But the mutual expulsions involved more than hubris. State Department officials were exasperated that the administration had forced freezing of personnel at the 251 level. Under a 1981 pact, the U.S. could have built its embassy and consulate staff up to 320—sorely needed, the diplomats claimed. On that score, the Soviets may have got the best of it by withdrawing the Soviet workers.



Soviet Embassy and living complex sit in affluent Washington, D.C., area

At another level, however, the U.S. may have come out ahead. Among Soviets expelled, one official said, were all of Moscow's spy managers in the U.S. and their deputies. There was a measure of retribution in that. Central Intelligence Agency Director William Casey was said to have approved the expulsions only because his corps in Moscow had been shattered earlier by the defection of Edward Howard, a former CIA agent.

With the shootout apparently ending, attention may return to arms-control talks—or the absence of them. Obviously neither side, despite rhetoric, felt pressure to hurry. That could change. But the prospect was that Geneva talks might yet be revived with little left from the spirit of Reykjavik, and that the U.S., if not the U.S.S.R., might be grateful. ■

by William L. Chaze with Dennis Mullin, Maureen Santini and Robert Kaylor in Washington, Douglas Stanglin in Bonn and Jeff Trimble in Moscow

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